

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD

MONDAY, May 19, 2003

3:00 P.M., J. MARTIN GRIESEL ROOM, CENTENNIAL PLAZA II

The Historic Conservation Board met at 3:00 P.M., in the J. Martin Griesel Room, Centennial Plaza II, with members Bloomfield, Borys, Kreider, Spraul-Schmidt, Sullebarger and Wallace present. Absent: Clement, Raser, and Senhauser

MINUTES

The minutes of the Monday, May 5, 2003 meeting were unanimously approved as amended (motion by Borys, second by Sullebarger).

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 444 READING ROAD, OVER-THE-RHINE (SOUTH) HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Caroline Kellam presented the staff report on a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of a handicap ramp at the Pendleton Street entrance to the Verdin Bell Company. The property at 444 Reading Road is a complex of buildings that contributes to the Over-the-Rhine (South) Historic District and is listed on the National Register.

Ms. Kellam explained that the Department of Transportation and Engineering is beginning streetscape improvements along Pendleton Street. The applicant proposes to remove the existing pressure treated steps and awning to the Pendleton entrance and construct the handicap ramp as part of the streetscape improvements. The proposed ramp will be constructed of pressure treated wood with a latticework base and turned balustrade/rail. It will extend approximately 39' along the east elevation of the building and approximately 3'-8" into the right-of-way. The height of the ramp will be 9' from grade at its highest point and 4' at its lowest.

Ms. Kellam said that the historic district guidelines do not specifically address handicap ramps, but new construction guidelines state that additions should be compatible in character with the original and designed to relate architecturally to the district. Staff feels the wood materials of the ramp are not compatible with the brick and stone buildings at 444 Reading Road. Staff felt a brick, concrete or steel ramp would be more appropriate and discussed these alternatives with the applicant. The applicant stated he proposed the pressure treated lumber because the basement of the building is located under portions of the sidewalk. A masonry ramp would involve extensive new footings with steel reinforcement to provide support and would therefore be cost prohibitive.

Ms. Kellam confirmed that staff had discussed using a more durable treatment for the base including vertical boards, masonry veneer or steel. The applicant was reluctant to consider alternatives due to cost and weight. Other locations for the ramp were considered including one off Spring Street, but that location is remote from both the main entrance and the parking lot. In response to Mr. Kreider, Ms. Kellam stated that the applicant is working with the Department of Transportation and Engineering on obtaining the revocable street privilege for construction in the right-of-way.

Mr. Kreider questioned if the ramp could be considered analogous to a rear porch. Urban Conservator Forwood replied that the guidelines for "Rehabilitation" addressing porches state only that they should be compatible. Additions are referenced in the "New Construction" guidelines.

Applicant Sam Crew, Sam Crew Construction, and Tom Price, Verdin Company, were present to address the Board. Mr. Price pointed out that the primary entrance to the church is off the parking lot on Pendleton and reiterated that the change in grade at that entrance makes it impossible for a ramp. Spring Street is not a primary entrance and there is no parking in the vicinity. Mr. Price stated that regardless of the material chosen - wood, masonry, or wrought iron - the vault under the sidewalk requires significant bracing under the sidewalk to support the ramp. The initial estimate for a masonry (concrete with brick veneer) ramp ranges from \$50,000 - \$60,000. Wrought iron or steel would cost \$20,000 - \$25,000. The estimate for the proposed wood ramp is \$10,000 - \$15,000. Mr. Price said that they would be amenable to changing the latticework to wood paneling.

Mr. Bloomfield stated that the design is out of character with the building and suggested the expedient solution proposed is contrary to the effort the Verdin Company has put into the building. He pointed out that a steel structure would not weigh much more than the wood and (with the estimates provided) the difference in cost would be negligible. He stated the final design could be wooden or steel, but stressed the importance of working with an architect to design a structure that works with the historic district and the historic church.

The Board discussed design alternatives. Mr. Kreider noted that some leeway could be given since it is being built in the public right-of-way and because the privilege is revocable, it could be torn down at a later date. He suggested incorporating the design used in the second level breezeway between buildings, an existing wooden feature of the building with raised panel sections. Mr. Bloomfield stated a simple metal railing or a combination of materials could be used that would enable the structure to be supported and also keep the cost down. Ms. Borys suggested they consider a design and materials that would be less vulnerable to wear and vandalism than the flimsy latticework proposed. She added that when one thinks of Verdin Bell, one visualizes foundries and metal.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second by Borys) to table the application to allow the applicant the opportunity to consider alternate materials and to develop a design more compatible with the building and the historic district.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 400 READING ROAD, OVER-THE-RHINE (SOUTH) HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Caroline Kellam presented the staff report on a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the rehabilitation of 400 Reading Road to four loft-style condominiums. The building, which is vacant, is a contributing resource to the Over-the-Rhine (South) Historic District.

Ms. Kellam summarized highlights of the proposed rehabilitation. The original storefront will be restored on the front elevation. The chimneys will be removed and replaced with flat shed roof dormers. The existing storefront openings on the west side elevation will be altered to accommodate four wood garage doors to provide the units with eight interior parking spaces. Three window openings on the west elevation will also be altered to doors for access to new metal balconies. The insignificant one-story rear addition will be demolished to allow the construction of a masonry, glass and metal entrance with an elevator and stairwell.

Kevin Speece, an abutting property owner who is rehabilitating the building two doors east of the subject property, attended the pre-hearing. He spoke in support of the project.

Ms. Kellam explained that some of the proposed alterations do not meet the letter of the guidelines, but staff believes they are acceptable in the context of the whole project. The district guidelines state that windows should not be altered, but three window openings to be converted to doors have been infilled and trim removed. Garage doors are not appropriate along the street frontage; however, the new openings will allow parking inside the building and help in marketing the units. The rear addition is an allowable loss in order to accommodate the new glass entrance at the rear of the site. Ms. Kellam noted that the remainder of the building is being restored.

Ms. Kellam confirmed for Ms. Sullebarger that the wood windows will be replaced with bronze aluminum windows to fit the original openings but that staff had not discussed alternative windows with the applicant. Ms. Sullebarger asked for clarification on how the guidelines address windows. Mr. Forwood stated that the present Over-the-Rhine (South) guidelines still stipulate that windows should be replaced with the same material. Mr. Kreider suggested that a condition could be added to the recommendation that staff approve alternative windows based on those the committee of the Board has reviewed and determined would be an appropriate.

In response to Ms. Borys, Ms. Kellam stated that an existing fire escape provides a second means of egress to the building. It will be repaired and the platforms extended.

Applicant Mark Gunther and owner Bill Baum were present to respond to questions from the Board. Mr. Baum clarified that the fifth floor would not be separately occupied and will be used primarily for mechanical equipment. Mr. Gunther confirmed that the elevator would not go to the fifth floor, although the stairway would.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted (motion by Kreider, second by Sullebarger) to take the following actions:

1. Find that the one-story addition at the rear of 400 Reading Road is not a significant addition and grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for its demolition; and
2. Approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the rehabilitation at 400 Reading Road with the following conditions:
 - a. The replacement windows shall match the appearance of the original windows in wood or a material acceptable to the Urban Conservator; and
 - b. Any revisions and final plans be reviewed and approved by the Urban Conservator prior to issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness and a building permit.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS AND ZONING VARIANCES, 1895 AND 1899 MADISON ROAD, EAST WALNUT HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Adrienne Cowden presented the staff report on a request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of two single-family residences on existing lots at 1895 and 1899 Madison Road. The properties are located within the East Walnut Hills Historic District in an area zoned R-1 (Single-Family Low Density District). Both lots are currently vacant. A single-family brick residence and a brick carriage house once occupied 1895 Madison Road. The lot at 1899 Madison Road most recently contained a swimming pool associated with the residence at 1895 Madison.

Ms. Cowden stated that William Hahn, of 1887 Madison Road, and Applicant/Architect Robert Sala attended the pre-hearing meeting. Mr. Hahn expressed concerned with identical houses being built on adjacent properties; however, he did not object to the design of the individual residences. The East Walnut Hills Assembly requested that the application be held until the Executive Committee has an opportunity to review the proposal. Ms. Cowden distributed three emails from neighbors received after the staff report was written. Mr. Hahn wrote reiterating his concerns expressed in the pre-hearing. Janet (and Richard) Niedhard, 1865 Madison Road, wrote opposing two identical houses on adjacent lots and requested that the Board delay the hearing until the Assembly had time to review the proposal. Michael Kelley of 1828 Keys Crescent wrote requesting that the Assembly be given the opportunity to review the plans and provide comment.

Ms. Cowden explained that buildings in an R-1 area must have one side yard setback of at least 10'-0" and that the sum of the side yards must be 20'-0". The setbacks, as determined by Buildings and Inspections (B&I), do not meet this requirement, so variances would be required. Additionally, since there is enough space in the driveway for a car to be parked, B&I has determined that this is a parking space. Since parking is not permitted in the front yard, a zoning variance would be required.

Ms. Cowden stated that the proposed designs exhibit an architectural style, massing, and material finishes that are compatible with the larger historic district. Ms. Cowden stated that front facing garages are found on the south side of Madison Road. The hedgerow is being retained, which will shield the garage from view along Madison Road. In addition, retaining mature trees and additional landscaping may soften the effect; however, staff has not yet been provided with a landscaping plan.

Ms. Cowden stated that the front yard setback is compatible with the residences on the south side of Madison Road to the west: those to the east are generally deeper. The irregular shape of the lot at Baker Place and Madison does not offer much flexibility for siting.

Ms. Cowden pointed out one additional issue concerns 2777 Baker Place, Mr. Chavez's property to the south. He would like to take one portion of 1895 Madison Road and include that with his property at 2777 Baker to accommodate a three-car garage for his residence. A preliminary design for the garage is included in the staff report, but a separate application for that work will be filed later.

Mr. Bloomfield asked for clarification on when the community received a copy of the proposal. Mr. Forwood replied that the plan was submitted to the Assembly a few days prior to its monthly meeting on the first Wednesday of the month. The Assembly wanted to review the project in Executive Committee (which meet on the fourth Thursday), and therefore requested the delay. Mr. Forwood indicated that the Assembly is aware that the Board may approve the application without their recommendation. Mr. Forwood reminded the Board that in addition to approving the design, the Board would be granting variances, which is of concern to the Assembly.

Mr. Bloomfield asked for staff's thoughts on the fact that there are no differences in the designs of the two residences. Ms. Cowden replied that there are slight variations in the design, primarily to the west wing; however, the variations are negligible. She stated that the guidelines do not specifically state that there cannot be twins on adjacent properties in the district; they state only that the design has to be compatible with the larger historic district. She confirmed that although there are homes that are reminiscent of each other, there are no identical adjacent residences elsewhere in the district.

Ms. Wallace commented that changing the color or material of the facade could change the feel of a building, even if they have the same design. Ms. Cowden replied that staff had discussed with the applicant the possibility of using stucco for one of the residences. Mr. Sala felt that it would not differentiate enough between the designs to merit doing it. He believed it made a stronger statement when they were both of the same material. They were designed as a pair, to be built side by side.

Applicant/Architect Robert Sala and Robert Chavez of 2777 Baker Place were present to respond to questions from the Board. Mr. Sala stated that mirror images were considered, but the living areas would be too close together. He explained that the reason they are oriented as they are is for the maximum sunlight to reach the interior. If the garages were put close together, one deck would be too close to Baker Place and the living area would be at the edge of the site. In response to Ms. Borys, Mr. Sala confirmed that the topography does change across the properties.

Mr. Kreider asked Mr. Sala or Mr. Chavez to point on the plan where mature trees will be lost. Mr. Sala responded that the ones that fall on the center of the lot would be difficult to save; however, they can try to save the ones on Baker. Mr. Kreider questioned if the design or setbacks could be modified to retain the existing large oak tree. Mr. Sala replied that it would be difficult to change the setbacks since the curb cut on Baker Place is needed to make the turn into the garage.

Ms. Borys pointed out that the house presented somewhat of a Victorian look from the front, but from the rear appeared more Arts and Crafts, due to the vocabulary of the windows. In addition, Ms. Borys stated that the door was small in proportion to the house and that the mix of limestone and wood on the porch is confusing. Mr. Sala replied that limestone is also used around the four windows and on the courtyard wall. He said three limestone walls surround an 8' door and the two large columns in front further define the entrance. If a transom were put in, because of the 9' interior, the door would have to be lowered to 6'-8". Ms. Borys stated a transom is not what is needed – it was more important to add width or sidelights to the door since it is narrow in proportion to the double windows. Mr. Sala stated it would be possible, as long as it does not conflict with the columns.

Ms. Sullebarger commented that each individual design probably meets the guidelines for the historic district, but she expressed concern with the impact of twins. She explained that because the East Walnut Hills Historic District is made up of very individual houses, the proposed residences would have much greater impact than typical new construction because of their similarity.

Mr. Kreider commented that trees help define East Walnut Hills and set it apart from other neighborhoods. He emphasized how the guidelines state that "mature trees should be retained, as should other significant features such as steps, retaining walls, walks, and fences which contribute to a property's character." He stated that a landscaping plan showing existing trees would be helpful and suggested that the trees may dictate some minor change in the design that could create enough variation to get away from the twin concept. Ms. Borys added that even though the elevation changes are slight, considering the topographic variation would improve the siting. Mr. Kreider added that the residences would be wonderful additions to the area.

Laura Wilson, co-trustee of 1901 Madison Road was present to address the Board. She explained that her mother has been out-of-town on an extended vacation, so the notice of the pre-hearing meeting did not come to her attention until after the hearing occurred. She was only able to view the plans prior to the Board meeting today. Ms. Wilson expressed concern with the twins. She stated that from her perspective, it is antithetical

to the historic district since they generate more of a suburban look. She noted several residences in the district share design features, but there are no duplicate houses. She stated that she did not object to the design and that if only one home was proposed, she would not have an issue.

In response to Mr. Bloomfield, Ms. Wilson said she was concerned about both the duplication and the density. She explained that while she understands that staff looked at the setbacks in the district, she felt setbacks tend to be much greater in the area than those proposed for these residences. Mr. Forwood added that he had received phone calls from individuals who were surprised that two houses being proposed. They were not aware that there were two legal lots there, because they had memory of only a single family with a large side yard. Mr. Kreider confirmed that the two lots existed at least as early as 1922 according to the Sanborn map referred to in the staff report.

Ms. Wilson questioned whether property owners would be notified of the next hearing if the application were tabled. Mr. Forwood explained that staff would contact those individuals who had contacted the Historic Conservation Office regarding the proposal. He added that when staff receives the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the 3-car garage at 2777 Baker Place, staff would notify separately for the hearing on that proposal.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second by Bloomfield) to table the application until the June 9, 2003 Historic Conservation Board meeting to allow the East Walnut Hills Assembly the opportunity to review the plans and the applicant to submit a landscaping plan that shows new and existing trees.

ADJOURNMENT

As there were no other items for consideration by the Board, the meeting adjourned.

William L. Forwood
Urban Conservator

John C. Senhauser
Chairman

Date